



Bulletin of the Government Museum Chennai

EDITED BY

Director of Museums
(IWA ENDOWMENT LECTURE)

“SYMBOLISM OF SACRED SPACE IN EARLY DRAVIDIAN
ARCHITECTURE”

by

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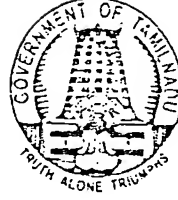
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FOREWORD

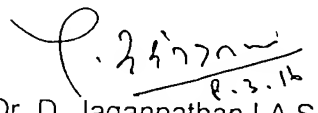
I.W.A endowment Lecture has been instituted in 1996 by International women's Association (I.W.A.), in the Government Museum Chennai and eminent scholars have delivered lectures. This bulletin is brought out, on the occasion of delivery of 18th Lecture in series titled "Symbolism of Sacred space in Early Dravidian Architecture", by Dr. Choodamani Nandagopal, M.A., Ph.D., Professor and Dean School of Humanities & Social Sciences, Jain University, Bangalore-560069.

This lecture deals with remarkable Dravidian architecture in south Indian Temples. The sacred structural form and space meet the needs of ritualistic and spiritual traditions in the early Dravidian Style. Ancient architecture expresses the sacred relationship between man and cosmos. The conception and thought process integrated with space in Dravidian architecture originates from the sanctum. The Sacred Geometry and its application in Temple Architecture are expressed in the south Indian Temple.

The Temples constructed by the Pallavas, Chalukyas and Rastrakutas symbolize the concept of sacred space metaphysically and structurally.

We take this opportunity to thank I.W.A. for instituting an Endowment in 1996 and for the support in organising 18 Lectures so far, and Dr. Choodamani Nandagopal for providing the printed scripts prepared by her, well in advance, to enable us to release this bulletin along with her lecture.

I am sure that this bulletin will be a valuable addition to the library of historians, students and scholars.


(Dr. D. Jagannathan, I.A.S.,)

Symbolism of Sacred Space in Early Dravidian Architecture



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'The Sacred structure is a microcosm; the world is a likeness'

- Ananda Coomaraswamy

This is the profound statement made by Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, the illustrious Art Historian regarding the creation of the sacred structure in relation to microcosm which represents the world itself. The sacred structural form and space meet the needs of ritualistic and spiritual traditions that translate into metaphysical heights. Such ancient architecture expresses the sacred relationship between man and the cosmos. The thoughts and concepts associated with the symbolism of sacred space is the direct expression of the cultural facets of a given society. Thus the spatial entity is the result of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage in the form of temple

architecture with profound inter-linkages with political and socio-religious perspective emerges as the supreme identity of the particular era. The richness of the contents of the sacred architecture provided scope for exploring the space in many ways.

Time and again Indian temples stood as the matrix to determine the religious, conceptual and structural progression. Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism (the religion that taken expression after *vedic* system) absorbed their concepts and practices through the evolution of the structural facets. These structures were the determining factors of the cultural life of the society. By reconstructing the historiography of architecture we get to realise the heights of cultural achievement of our country. Today we bring all these symbols of Indian life under the category of heritage sites and historical monument. Certain township in India evolved, thrived and remain a place of importance in present times due to their significance as religious centres.

Such centres are categorised as Punyakshetras (holy places) Badari, Kedar, Hardvar, Kashi, Mathura, Brandavan, Puri, Dwaraka, Ujjayin, Nasik, Kamakhya, Tirupati, Hampi, Udupi, Sringeri, Madhurai, Kanchipuram, Srirangam, Guruvayur and other places receive a large member pilgrims throughout the year. (Ayodhya Mathura, Maya Kasi Avantika, Duripvaravati caiva saptatita mokshadayikah) A devout Hindu considers himself worthy of taking human life if he undertakes journey to these Punyakshetras in his life time.

These pilgrimages are the sources of economic activities for the local people providing various services to the visitors. A few among these have archaeological and art historical interests, considered as the protected monuments under Archaeological survey of India. Kanchipuram is one such township raised to a status of a district headquarters in present situation providing employment of manufacturing silk sarees to 70% of the people and also thriving as a religious centre with a great following of Shaiva, Vaishnava, Shakta and Jaina faiths.

Devalaya, Devasthana, Devayatana, Kovil are the generic terms stating the meaning as the dwelling place for Gods. 'Prasada' is a special term attributing to the class of architecture that houses the God as well as humans. Early texts like *Brhatsamhita* of Varahamihira and *Vishnuudharmottarapurana* have discussed the structural and technical components of temple architecture under a chapter known as *Prasadalakshnani*.

'Temple' is the special category of structural progression in the whole range of science and art of architecture. The dictionary gives the explanation as building devoted to the worship or regarded as dwelling place of a god or gods or other objects of religious reverence. The temples are the landmark structures of the ancient cultures at any point of time. The Egyptian, Greek and Byzantine phases were characterised with the monumental structures soaring to reach the aspirations of Gods in relation to humans in the form of gigantic temples.

According to Indian mindset life is a continuing process of spiritual alchemy whereby the individual being through countless incarnations, is gradually purified in the fire of experience to the point where he or she can consciously reunite with Brahman, the matrix of all life. The Sanskrit term used to describe creation and journey of the soul is *lila*, 'the divine play'. Using the word in both its joyful and its dramatic sense. As the Taittiriya Upanishad exuberantly proclaims, 'From joy all beings are born, by joy all beings are sustained and into joy all beings again return'. This is the true nature of human body, which is to transcend our customary limitations set by habit and ignorance, and realize our identity with the Divine from which all life springs. Artistic creation plays a crucial role in this process of discovery. (Alistair Shearer, *The Hindu Vision*) All divine deeds converge into selfless offerings and dedication of temples to the divine forms was one such selfless and monumental tribute to society.

It is interesting to understand and comprehend the complex relationship between religious philosophy, ritual practices and architectural space. These are not to be seen as separate entities or occurrences. They rather foster the entire principle of living within.

This would in turn form the basis for establishing the extent of the temple precinct as a religious entity as well as an architectural ensemble.

A sincere effort is being made here to address the issues like how the architectural form meet the needs of ritualistic and spiritual traditions which translate into metaphysical heights, how these tangible and intangible aspects translated into cultural thoughts and how this spatial entity in the form of temple architecture with profound inter-linkages with political and socio-religious context emerge as the identity of the era. The richness of the contents of the temple provided scope for exploring in all possible ways.

The Rajasimhesvara grham, (as notified in the foundation inscription issued by Pallava Rajasimha) but popular as Kailasanatha Temple at Kanchipuram is the earliest all complete Saiva architecture in India. This temple has been studied, documented, analysed by archaeologists and art historians since last 150 years. This unique structure generated interest in creating numerous reports, essays and volumes.

After reviewing the entire literature published on the subject it was felt that this temple has still a potential to be studied with fresh insights such as how and when the architecture comprising the *saiva* nomenclature has evolved in terms of the concept of Kailasa, the abode of Siva, the formation of *garbhagruha* and the principle deity, the need and development of subsidiary shrines, The Nandimantapa, the setting up of a sacred tank, a well for drawing water for the rituals etc., (Today all these features appear very common to identify a *saiva* architecture)

Which of the existing monuments can be considered as the earliest role model for the building of a temple for the God Siva. These questions driven the author to go into the early phase of Indian Temple Architecture and explore the possibility to establish a prescribed criteria for the construction of temples dedicated to Siva. As a result of the quest, three monuments stood in line to explore, namely, Kailasanatha Temple at Kanchipuram, Virupaksha Temple at Pattadakal and Kailasa Temple at Ellora.

In supporting the novelty of the idea Lord Siva himself gave the divine directions to pursue the study. Having researched the ritualistic sources (The author of this paper for the first time unveiled the realm of rituals, festivals which were part of living tradition in society through her publications on Ritual utensils, Temple Jewellery and Temple chariots. for more details ref; Temple Treasures Vol. I - Ritual Utensils, Vol. II - Temple Jewellery, Vol. III. Temple Chariots) it was possible to understand the cultural background which is required for such a study. Having trained the heart, mind and eye to approach a temple not as a dead monument but as a living organism, it was possible to visualise Kailasanatha Temple at Kanchipuram from holistic perspective as a living temple organism with aesthetic dimensions.

Burgess and Alexander Rea were the early archaeologists who visited the Kailasanatha temple frequently to examine the architectural glory besides preparing conservation reports. Some of their observations still hold good for understanding the temple complex in its complete sense. As Rea opines ' Before 1883 it was not known that in Kanchipuram existed oldest examples of South Indian architecture. There is an unmistakably characteristic individuality common to Pallava monolithic and structural temples, which at once singles them out from and can in no wise lead to their being associated with the mass of later Dravidian works.' When we place the Kailasanatha Temple along with several lofty towered typical Dravidian structures, this temple lends a distinct visual experience in terms of plan and execution. Some have even supposed this temple as originally Jaina, but Alexander Rea categorically rejects this view point while considering the plan and the schema of sculpture that never corresponding to a Jaina requirement.

The stages of architectural formation brightens up in the Tondainadu during the reign of Narasimha – I. But it reaches the pinnacle in the form of structural temple architecture in the life time of Palalva Rajasimha. Although the Tamil literature and culture was established in the entire Tamil Nadu region, long back, because of the Pallava's affiliation to Sanskrit lineage the tamil culture borrowed freely from

Sanskritised versions of Temple traditions whether it is structural architecture or the worship system. Tamilian scholars of ancient times developed a separate Gratha script for Sanskrita texts. The foundation and many other inscriptions of Rajasimha period are composed and engraved in Grantha script, known as Pallava Grantha.

There has been complexity in terms of the study in the architectural styles of south India. The scholars who have contributed to the volumes on Temple Architecture published by American Institute of Indian studies have cleared the confusion of terminology in recognising the period and architectural styles. They have given an acceptable formula in approaching a particular temple. With reference to the Kailasanatha Temple Kanchipuram they first take up with the identification of region, followed by the dynasty. The reason quoted as the 'Artistic traditions are taken to be rooted in a territory, given shape by dynastic patronage, then spread by the course of empire. Art remains in the hands of craftsmen, however and 'style is seen as located in a nexus between region and patronage'. (Ed. Michael W. Meister 1999)

While examining the Pallava architecture and 'style' of Rajasimha's phase, it is quite convincing to view the evolution and development of 'Rajasimha style' from the context of the proliferation of structures in the Tondaimandalam region and the personal caliber of the patron to pronounce a new wave in temple building. The study and research of the temple forms that widely spread all over the Deccan is a real challenge to the scholars.

But the scholars Prof M.A. Dhaky, Michael W. Meister and Krishna Deva of American Institute of Indian Studies has made genuine efforts to bring out an acceptable classification. The entire rock-block of Deccan emerging from Satmala-Ajanta ranges in the central India extending to the Nilagiri ranges in the South is surrounded by waters on three sides, supported with forests, hills, rivers and plains. The Vindhya mountains had been recognised as the Southern limit of Aryavarta or North India from historical times. These for a long time isolated the peninsular South India, acting as a barrier to free movement of population.

The South was thus comparatively protected from the great invasions that North India witnessed in the course of its history. The nature and morphology of South is in a way a blessing in safe-guarding the Indian culture during the times of turmoil. The complexity of

architectural identity in the Deccan has brought under two broad divisions namely Upper Dravida Desa and Lower Drivada Desa. The present Southern part of Maharashtra, entire Andhra Pradesh and Northern part of Karnataka is brought under Upper Dravidadesa. The lower Drivada Desa consists of Southern Karnataka, entire Tamil Nadu and Kerala states. The de-codification of architectural styles of South India falls into this understanding conveniently.

India is well-known for the textual heritage. Based on the oral tradition the texts were compiled and later they have been codified and brought to written version during the Gupta era. Several texts in literature, religion, arts, science or other humanitarian fields were authored by scholars and practitioners of the traditions. These texts in the form of manuscript written in early Prakrt and Sanskrit were handed over from master to disciples and they were in regular usage as part of living tradition.

With the frequent upheaval in the political situation of the country preserving these texts for posterity became a challenging task. We have lost enormous number of valuable texts over the centuries and whatever was accessible have been preserved in the manuscript libraries of our country and few libraries outside India. Some of the texts were translated by scholars during last two centuries much more are yet to be brought to the light.

Based on the available sources efforts have been made to reconstruct the architectural history of India. The temple architecture as a field of study caught the interest of the western scholars who were associated with Archaeological Survey of India which was set up by the British Government to protect and safeguard the temples of historical importance. Early study in the field was based on the methodology that was evolved by these scholars. This methodology comprised the search of evidences for designating the period and assigning the credit of building the temples to a particular dynasty, the study of architectural units and features from the point of view of restoration and preservation and also writing about the sculpture from artistic view point.

The major temples which were lying uncared for centuries were restored and protected as the monuments of historical importance under Archaeological Survey of India established in 1861.

Reports on epigraphs and field study were published regularly which built up as basic source material for research on Indian architecture. The credit of first stage of scientific documentation of these ancient structures would be definitely bestowed on the research and writings of early British and Indian archaeologists and art historians.

Whether it is temple, church or mosque, fort or palace, the archaeological terminology and official nomenclature recognise these structures as the 'monuments'. There is no distinction of what so ever between the temple architecture and other structures here. Indian Temple architecture has much more to offer as living organism than the meaning that carries as 'Monument'.

Realising the dimension and culture in which the temples evolved, the art historians like V.S. Agarwal, Stella Kramerich, Ananda Coomarasvamy, M.A. Dhaky, Soundaryarajan, Ayangar, C. Shivarama Murthy, Kapila Vatsyayan and others during last six decades took a step beyond the parameters of archaeological research which widened the horizon of studying Indian temple architecture. Their interpretation heavily rely on the textual tradition. Their enquiry into the forms and functions of temple architecture evolved a methodology of stylistic analysis with reference to the textual material and architectural manual which were in use for building temples.

The research on sculpture as part of architecture established the connectivity of the traditions and the relevance to their depiction on temple space. The texts like Samarangana Sutradhara, Manasara, Ajitagama, Kamikagama, Kashyapashilpa, Aparajitaprccha served as dependable source material to study the technicalities of temple building with existing examples of temple architecture emerged from 10th century.

By tenth century the major generic styles in temple architecture namely, *Nagara*, *Dravida* and *Vesara* were formulated and established. The architectural terms used in these texts were cross examined and correlated with existing temples. The anglicized terminology of Indian temple architecture is replaced by the terminology as used in Indian texts by the painstaking research conducted by the scholars involved in writing the Encyclopedia of Indian Temple Architecture.(Publication of American Institute of Indian Studies) They have even tried to clear the confusion in attributing the styles to regional affiliations for example by grouping the temples under upper *Dravida desa* and Lower *Dravida Desa*, *Karnata* style etc.

Encouraged by the scope, artistic merits and interesting design components the Indian temples offer, a generation of western scholars have chosen different styles and group of temples as their research area and are producing good number of focused studies which serve as the contribution for the historiography of Indian Temple Architecture. These studies are supported by good visual material had set a trend of writing on individual temples.

What is probably lacking here is looking at the Temple from holistic approach and visualizing the complexity of the cultural backdrop in which the temple evolved by itself. The concern here may be looking at the temple as an organic entity than as a monument. The understanding of Kapila Vatsyayan in this regard sets a direction for rethinking on Indian Temple architecture.

The present author began to look at the temple architecture as the centripetal force of every human activity which out sourced as centrifugal force for the human progress. In this process of moving from centripetal to centrifugal force the single strength that operates is the ritual system. Thus the temple architecture is the convulsing space of intangible and tangible heritage. The eternal transformation of intangible to tangible and vice versa is enlivened creative process through which the temple culture manifests.

The twenty years of research in temple traditions has convinced this author of the greatness of traditional knowledge and the thought process and action that underwent in making the chosen place for building a temple transforming into a manifestation of a sacred space. To put it appropriately "of late, there has been a renewed interest in rituals, and many scholars from different parts of the world are examining the archaeological evidence relating to vessels, jewellery etc. with a view to identifying or reconstructing the function of these items. The living traditions of India, with a long and unbroken continuity of modes worship authenticated by the agamas and the practicing priests provide material for conducting holistic studies with a view to comprehending the unifying vision and spirit which motivated such an awe-inspiring sense of design and motif. In contemporary language, the architecture and the sculpture, the paintings, images, jewellery and worship, music and dance constitute a single ensemble". (Kapila Vatsyayan while writing the foreword for the book Temple Treasures Vol II Temple Jewellery by Dr. Choodamani Nandagopal and Vatsala Iyengar)

In this study a humble effort is made to present the Kailasanātha Temple of Kanchipuram, the Virupaksha Temple Pattadakal, Ellora of Kailasa and Vaikuntha Perumal Temple of Kanchipuram on a convincingly appropriate methodology prescribed by earlier scholars and going a step ahead to analyse the edifice from multi-disciplinary approach that involve the initial survey of the site and preparing an agenda of investigating the issues and problems relating the domains of structure proper and the cultural linkages through which the architecture evolved.

After making a preliminary survey of the architectural space as well as the historical layers, and the number of inscriptions appearing on the architectural units including the foundation inscription of the temple, the first question came to the mind of the author was what was the source and possible text for the temple construction which the builders relied upon. By surveying the available texts on architecture and their possible dating it was realised that most of these texts regarded as source material for studying

Indian Temple Architecture are of post-Pallava period. Except *Brhat Samhita* of Varaha Mihira and *Vishnu Dharmottara Purana* none of them are attributed to the period the Temple Kailasanatha belonged.

Most of the *Vastu* texts were compiled or written after 10th century A.D. By then the experimentation stages of temple building in Rock-cut technique was almost given up after achieving the climax of erecting the Kailasa temple at Ellora. The experimentation stages in structural temple building were almost over and the technique and function of structural temple architecture was getting standardised. Many Sanskrit texts and texts in regional languages in south India served as manuals for temple architecture which were built from 10th century to post-Vijayanagar times up to 17th century..

It is not an easy task to identify a particular text that would correlate with the existing structure in question. The search for an architectural grammar intend to examine the textual tradition, the devotional literature and epigraphs contemporaneous to the construction of the temples such as Kailasanatha Temple, Vaikunthaperumal Temple, Virupaksha Temple and Kailasa Temple of Ellora .

By studying the evolution and development of temple architecture we come to a clear understanding of the cultural life of South India. Unlike northern parts of the country south has still retained the traditions followed since long period of time. The living traditions of today are all emerged along with the temple activities of ancient times. Probably what we experience in the south today was the national culture of India during historical times.

Due to Islamic occupation in the north the temples failed to survive as living entity with unbroken tradition of worship and rituals. Although South India suffered intermitted set-backs, they were not long lasting or overwhelming. The revivalist movement during Vijayanagar times has caught the loosing traditions mid-way and restored the temples and the life-style of the people associated with the temple activities. Thus Indian culture was safeguarded and passed on to the safe hands. Kanchi being the pilgrimage had

received the royal patronage from Pallavas to Vijayanagar rulers and even later during the times of Nayakas.

When a devotee stands before the temple complex a kind of sacred geometry casts spell on him. His mind is pre-occupied with the visualisation of the moment where he is going to be in union with God. His sensory organs stimulate to receive the transmission of divine energy. He must have walked miles or climbed steep steps to experience just that moment of energy which touch him. He is prepared to pay any price just for that moment which is a priceless experience. Passing through the miles he paved to reach the temple precinct, passing through the several *prakaras* or *mantapas* of the temple precincts and passing through *sukhanasi* (the intermediary structure, the vestibule which connects *garbhagriha* and *navaranga* in other words the sanctum and the main pillared hall) the devotee finally encounters the truth, face to face. He surrenders himself before the truth in the form of the deity in Sanctum. This incredible experience had been possible only after paving a step after step through the sacred space, the temple architecture in its form, content and experience.

The conception and thought process integrated with space in *Drávida* architecture originates from the *garbhā* – the sanctum. According to Vedic symbolism the cave or *garbhagriha* is compared with a womb from which all life emanates. The darkness of the *garbhagriha* is comparable to 'the unknown' or 'the mysterious'. The axial movement towards the *garbhagriha* from the outside to inside, from elaboration to simplicity, from multiplicity to unity through successive enclosures, each with a heightened sense of focus is suggestive of introspection. It parallels the exploration of oneself through a sequential process of sacrificing worldly comforts.

Vedic experience is the realisation of human endeavor evolved through several millennia in its entire entirety. This is experienced through *Yaj nas* which are the practical steps to the realisation of one's own purpose of life. Through that realisation one goes closer to accomplish the everlasting peace. It is true that each one of us cannot

perform a *yajna* but we can become part of the great multitude thereby we realise the micro and macro levels of the Law of universe. Thus the prime goal of *yajnas* is the achievement of highest state of mind '*Prajna*'. '*Yajna*' to '*Prajna*' is a process of accomplishment that leads to the Vedic experience.

It is believed that the universe evolved out of chaos and will return to it, Everyday the individual can return to the primordial instant of creation and can thereby mimic the evolution of the universe as it oscillates between chaos and cosmos¹.

Sacred Geometry - its application in Temple Architecture:

'The temple marks the moment and place of cosmogonist organization. It measures the "altar" of the earth's surface and recreates the axial centre of the universe.'² The *Kathia Upanishad* describes the human body as the chariot of the '*atman*' within and reflecting this symbolism the Indian temple form in some respects became a manifestation of the human body itself. Vatsyayan is of the view that the architectural plan of the Hindu temple correlates with the 'figure of man' as the point of reference and is the basic measure of construction or proportioning. Correlations are also drawn in *vaastu* texts between the '*purusa*' and different parts of the temple in the vertical plane.³ As Swami Jitatmananda puts it, 'the temple became a place where man's biological entity is changed into a divine being'⁴

Parallels are also drawn between the temple layout and the 'architectural schema of the *yajna* and its methodology of consecrating space and time to replicate a cosmos on earth'⁵

The *Vaastu-purusa-mandala*, a square divided into smaller multiples, used ritually to found brick altars is the *yantra* that forms the basis of the temple plan and is a reflection of the cosmic structure of the universe with each smaller unit associated with specific planetary positions. It functions as an architectural tool that gives the underlying order and system of proportioning to the temple plan. The center coincides with the position of the main deity within the *garbhagriha*. In Indian metaphysics, all theories of the creative evolution of the universe postulate the primary existence of a centre from

which all manifestation emanates. In this point the creative will of the Supreme is latent.⁶ According to Mitchell profound significance is attached to the center of the temple *mandala*, as it is here the worshipper may experience transformation as he comes into direct contact with the cosmic order.⁷

The temple complex is the focal point of all ritualistic activities. Around the main temple the three sides are embedded with a colonnade all around overlooking the street forms a square with the main temple as a focal point where most of the *utsavas*, temple processions and celebrations are regularly taken place. These four streets are flanked by the *agrāharas*, the rows of houses of Brahmins who are associated with the temple activities. The entire space fits into the square block which forms like a ritualistic grid with clear demarcation for all the socio-cultural activities associated with temple.

The notion of Hinduism has always rested on the notion of the One, the Divine, who divided himself within himself to form his own self-created opposite, the manifested universe. Within the divine self-regard, three qualities of himself became distinguished: *Sat* (immobile being), *Chit* (consciousness – force), and *Ananda* (bliss). The original unity, represented by a circle, is then restated in the concept of the Real-Idea, the thought of God, which the Hindus called the *Bindu* or seed, what the western civilization recognize as geometrical point.⁸ The manifestation of space is encircled around this *bindu*, which forms a base for all geometrical permutations and combinations in terms of different shapes, forms, progressions and calculations. This sacred geometry again originates from the *yajna vēdi* – the fire alters.

The Foundation of the *Garbhagrha* is the proto-type of a *yajna vēdi*:

Yajna vēdi is the focal point erected in the central part of the *Yajnasala*. The *Mahavēdi* is a special fire alters of different shapes, among which the *Garudacayana* is the unique one. The *Garudacayana* is erected facing east in the shape of a giant Bird, the Garuda, the vehicle of Mahavishnu. Since it has five layers it takes five days to lay. Formation of

Garudachayana is the most spectacular exercise of the *yajna* and is the most complicated process which has to be experienced physically. The laying of the bird is associated with the *Panchatatvas*, the Primordial five elements of which the life in the universe exists.

Ritualistically with a measuring stick (signifying the hand-measure of the space that was allotted for the *Mahavedi*) to be criss-crossed from all eight directions symbolizing the evoking of the *Astadikpalas*, the Guardians of eight directions, *Adhvairyu*, the sole executor of all the rituals and *Yajamana*, the Master of the *Yajna* under the supervision of Brahma, the principal Advisor of the *Yajna* take calculated steps to mark the central point, the *bindu*, the *Sadasyas*, the members associated with the rites assist in digging a square shaped pit, the *mandala*. The materials to be placed in the pit are to be checked and kept at the convenient distance.

The first step of the creation of *Mahavedi* is the preparation of ground followed by the laying of foundation, commences with the consecration of the space and all the materials – human, animal, plant, in symbolic forms made of terracotta and actual metal are to be placed in the pit, and this space is known as *vastu – Mandalesha*. Then the pit has to be covered with mud and bricks, the first layer, *prastara* is laid representing the *Bhutatva*, the principle of earth, the physical space, the solidity and the strength. *Visvakarma*, the celestial architect will be invoked and his blessings will be sought by placing five bricks on five parts of the bird (tail, navel, two wings and neck) finally every brick is touched with the chants of *Bhutatva* to strengthen the foundation.

The second layer is the *Jalaprastara* representing water, the essential source for all living organism. The rituals invoke God Varuna and symbolically the *Rtviks*, the performers of the *yajna* show the downpour of water and create space for storing water. The chanting has the effect of the rhythm of water and each of the bricks are consecrated with a feeling of water, a sustainable source and cooling factor of all kinds of energy and signifies the balancing act.

The third layer, the *Agniprastara* indicates the principle of energy, the *Tejastatva*; it is related to the showering of gold brick. Tiny particles of gold were sprinkled on third layer of bricks; the *mantras* that are chanted explain the origin, strength, energy, loveliness obtained in the yellow metal, the *suvarna*. The consecration rituals begin from the neck portion of the bird, while *prajapati* is invoked by chanting special portions from all the three *Vedas*. This is an extended realisation of the principle that every soul is illuminated with its own intrinsic strength to become one with the concentric whole. The three layers are the terrestrial in existence -concretisation of earth, water and fire (energy).

The fourth layer is based on *Vayutatva* representing the principle of air. The movement of laying of the bricks consecrating commences from the navel of the bird and spreads towards outstretched wing, neck and tail. This process is longer compared to the other three layers, the chants invokes the whole of universe, celestial nature, sun, moon and whole of the environment. The wind starts blowing; the weather indicates the cool breeze that smoothen the hot evening.

The *Panchamaprastara*, representing the *Akashatatva*, the cosmic world is created by laying the last 200 bricks on the Bird altar. The invoking deity is Gayatri, the entire *Rtvikaganas* with raised voice chant the *Chaturvimshati stotra*, symbolising the placing of *Yajamana* into the celestial world, by invoking the stars, full-moon and new-moon days.

Finally the *Pranatatva*, the initiation of soul into the Bird is to be performed by offering evening *Pravargya* rituals performed elaborately and that marks the completion of the *Garudacayana*, Bird Alter. Finally the *Garuda chayana* is highlighted with *Shantimantra*. Further on the central point, the *bindu*, the *homa* is performed to seek the welfare of the people and universe, *Sarvejanaha sukhinobhavantu*.⁹

This *yajurvedi* with *panchaprastara*, the fire layers signifying the Primordial Elements namely Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Cosmos transforms to the sacred space in the form of

lower part of the *adhisthana* of the *Garbhagriha* and the *mulanurti*, the worshipping principal deity of the temple is placed on the *bindu*. The *yajna* alters and *yajnashalas* were not permanent structures, they were to be erected every time in different places. When the need of permanent place to worship arose the *yajnavedi* and the *yajnashala* were transformed into stone structure, and the consecration rites were very much corresponded the performance of *yajna*. The parameters that governed the evolution and development of early Dravidian temple architecture are: Religious thought, Water bodies, Rituals and the *sthala vruksha*, the place-tree.

The perception of sacred space and concepts in Temple Architecture:

The texts and oral traditions, epics and other religious literature make references to the space of sacred of divine significance such as Kailasa, *Vaikuntha*, *Sri Chakra*. Some of the *purana* texts narrate very interestingly the form, environment and divinity manifested in the above mentioned concepts. *Kailasa* is the abode of Shiva and it is the *mokshasthana*, the final destination for a *Shivabhakta*. Similarly *vaikuntha* is the celestial abode of Vishnu and the final destination for a *Vaishnavas*. The *Sri Chakra* is the space where the *shakti*, the female divine power rests.

In South India a Sanskrit text by name *Isanagurudeva Paddhati* or *Isana Gurudeva*, is considered authentic for the study of Temple Architecture dates to eighth century gives an account of 20 varieties of temples for the Trinity, Bramha, Vishnu and Siva .Among them there *Kailasachhanda* and *Vishnuchhanda* are special types of *vimana* for Siva and Vishnu respectively. The *shikhara* and temple is referred as *vimana* in *Dravida* style where as *prasada* in *Nagara* style of temple architecture. (Ed. Ganapati Shastri M.T. *Isanagurudeva Paddhati* Vol. I P. 134)

When cross-checked with the text like *Brihat Samhita*, mention is made of 24 types of temples namely, 1. *Meru*, 2. *Mandara*, 3. *Kailasa*, 4. *Vimanachhanda*, 5. *Nandana*, 6. *Samudga*, 7. *Padma*, 8. *Garuda*, 9. *Nandivardhana*, 10. *Kunjara*, 11. *Guharaja*, 12. *Vrsa*, 13.

Hamsa, 14. *Sarvatobhadra*, 15. *Ghata*, 16. *Simha*, 17. *Vritta*, 18. *Catuskona*, 19. *Sodasari* 20. *Astasri*. (Ramakrishna Bhat Brhath samhita) The features of *Kailasa* type of temple according to the text is similar to that of *Mandara*, having hexangular plan, 28 cubits in width and has eight storey. The height of the *vimana* is 56 cubits

The perception of sacred space in the form of *Kailasa*:

The *garbhagriha* is the focal point axially both in the vertical and horizontal plane. The form of the superstructure above the *garbhagriha* is representative of a mountain and for this particular temple the name itself is suggestive of *Kailasa*, the cosmic mountain and the heavenly abode of Lord Shiva. According to Boner, it is representative of the aspiration and ascent from the plane of earthly existence to the spiritual plane of pure and deathless consciousness.¹⁰ According to Kramrisch, the metaphysical Indian conception of space was given form architecturally in three-dimensional space by the creation of the sacred mountain.¹¹

The terms like '*meru*' Mountain, *Parvata*, *shaila*, *acala*, *giri* etc. are the terms we use in referring to the elevated concept of space. These words have a generic sense as segment of space. But the 'space' per se has a special sense of philosophic content in it. The 'Mountain' in the light of Indian tradition and literature is a higher concept than a vivid description of physical feature on the earth, with higher altitude. *Linga purana* mythologises on the term and content '*achala*' as the mountain ranges had become diffuse and spread out all over the earth after having been torn apart by the cosmic fire at the end of the previous cycle, then the surface of the earth turned into one great ocean which chilled those diffuse rocks and ranges; there up *vayu* blew the scattered pieces together, and they became firm and 'motionless' after this process hence '*achala*'. This word is frequently used in *puranic* literature and Buddhist *Tantric*.

An interesting narration of *Kailasa*,¹² the abode of Siva finds a place in *Shiva Purana*. The *puranas* carry the beliefs, customs and traditions of *Kailasa* for a devotee of Shiva it is the

summit he reaches with no point of return. The ultimate aim of *Shivabhakta* is to have *darshan* of his Lord seated amidst his benevolent family in his abode, *Kailasa*. While describing the mountain, it is realised that the *Kailasa* is of variegated shades because it is composed with colourful minerals.

The parallel is drawn between the description of *Kailasa* and a *Dravidian* Temple architecture dedicated to Siva.

| <i>Kailasa</i> | Temple Architecture |
|--|--|
| The mountain <i>Kailasa</i> is composed with stone and Variegates shades of minerals | Structural temple is built with stone, quarried with mineral contents, natural shades |
| The ' <i>Meru</i> ' – peak appears like a golden Umbrella | The ' <i>Shikhara</i> ' – Super structure of the temple is adorned with golden <i>Kalasha</i> |
| The mountain ' <i>Kailasa</i> ' ranges between east and west | The entry to the temple from east and reaches Vertically to the west. |
| The <i>Kubera</i> resides in one part which is beautiful abundant with greenery and different kinds of animals | The <i>Astadikpalas</i> occupy the respective space. The <i>nidhi</i> sculptures are placed symbolically signifying plenty |

| | |
|---|---|
| <i>Kailasa</i> is surrounded with abundant water resources. | The temple is built closer to river, sea or tank. Or a water body is created in the form of sacred tank – <i>Pushkarani</i> . |
|---|---|

The *Kailasa* is vertically divided into to 3 parts - The lower part – close to earth which was uprooted by Ravana. This is the *prastara* portion, the foundation, the *blutatva* of temple architecture. The middle portion – dedicated to *Sivabhaktas*. The *ganas*, *gandharvas*, *kinnaras*, the patrons are depicted on the *bhitti* (wall portion in temple architecture). The top portion is dedicated to Siva, the '*Shikhara*', when Shiva enters into speculative moods. The focal point axially both in vertical and horizontal plane. Thus the *garbhagruha* rising to *Shikhara* is the metaphorical identity for a sacred space. The treatment of '*Shikhara*' obviously is a challenging point for the master architect.

The *shringa* of *Kailasa* is a place of Cosmic activity where all the divinities take resort Siva pleased to dance with the accompaniment Bramha placing on *Mrdanga* and Vishnu on *Tala*. The sages, *Sivaganas*, other *devatas* assemble to witness the cosmic dance. Nandi and Mahakosa are guardian deities. Skanda is seated on the lap of Parvati, Ganesha playing on instrument or imitating Shiva while watching the cosmic dance.

If we observe the wall portion and *shikhara* of the temple architecture the panels depict the *sivalila*. One has to pass through *Vrashabha* the gigantic bull before entering *Kailasa*. So also in Temple architecture Nandi *Mantapa* is at the entry point.

Transformation of *Kailasa* into the plan form of architecture

Varahamihira in his treatise *Brhatsamhita*, the 6th century text explains about the types of the temples in the chapter *Prasadalakshanam*. There are twenty types of temples enumerated and among them he places *Kailasa* in the third order. *Kailasa* type of temple is similar to *Meru* and *Mandara* which are hexangular, 30 cubits in width, and has ten storeys and domes. But *Kailasa* has eight floors and 28 cubits in width.¹³ The Emperors

of South India in 8th century conceived the concept of Kailasa in the temple form and the meritorious architects designed and executed exclusive temples in *Dravida* style. To examine the transformation of the concept and creation of the *Kailasa* into architectural form, three great monuments have been chosen here which symbolises the concept of sacred space metaphysically and structurally.

1. Pallava Rajasimha constructed Kailasa temple at Kanchipuram in 715 - 730 AD which was known as Raja Simheshvara grha.
2. Secondly Chalukya Vikramaditya (his queens) constructed Virupaksha Temple at Pattadakal which was known as Lokeshwara temple in 733-45 AD.
3. Thirdly Rastrakuta Krishna constructed Kailasa Temple at Ellora 756-773 AD.

Particularly the creation of *Kailasa* caught the fancy of builders between sixth and eighth century A.D. and as a result we have two magnificent structures one at Kanchipuram and the other at Ellora. The last few lines of the foundation inscription of Rajasimha reads as "This towering shrine like a mountain dedicated to Rajasimhesvara by stealing the grandeur of Mt. Kailasa and escalating like a sky scraper may make a permanent abode of Lord Shiva".¹⁴ The king with the epithet as *Shiva Choodamani* has created a parallel *kailasa* on the sacred space of Kanchipuram in the form of Rajasimhesvaragriham'

Transformation of *Vaikuntha* into the plan form of architecture

Another Temple belonging to the sect of *Vaishnavas* is the Vaikuntha Perumal Temple, the temple dedicated to the Lord of *Vaikuntha* Maha Vishnu was constructed around 750 A.D. This temple represents all the features of *Vaikuntha* described in various texts and legends. Its three levels or tiered *vimana* is about 20 m high, the God in recline position in the central shrine, symbolising the state of *stithi*, the lower shrine has the image of seated Vishnu and the top most shrine houses the Vaikunthanarayana murti in the *leelasana* posture. Thus giving the divine *darshana* in the three postures and

conceived in a *vimana* having vertical division of three shrines. The enclosure is surrounded by a gallery of colonnade intended to guide the procession of the Lord and also serves as circumambulatory passage for the devotees. It is for the first time that the *Vaikuntha*, the abode of Maha Vishnu is conceived in the form of Temple architecture.

Conclusion

By examining these two grand examples one as *Kailasa* and the other as *Vaikuntha* the builders are to be complemented for creating unique temple forms with the vision of sacred space *Kailasa* and *Vaikuntha*. They have recorded their concepts in inscriptions that they had issued while laying the *adhishthana* part of the temple.

Particularly the creation of *Kailasa* caught the fancy of builders between sixth and eighth century A.D. and as a result we have two magnificent structures one at Kanchipuram and the other at Ellora. The evolution and development of temple architecture with its needful manifestation in the form of function, ritual, spiritual and artistic merits are found in all the stages of experimentation in Chalukyan, Pallava, Chola and Hoysala styles of architecture in southern part of India.

Come let's adore in the Cosmic Temple

The God whose form is plain and simple

The collective soul with Love and Service

By this we are sure to know that God is!

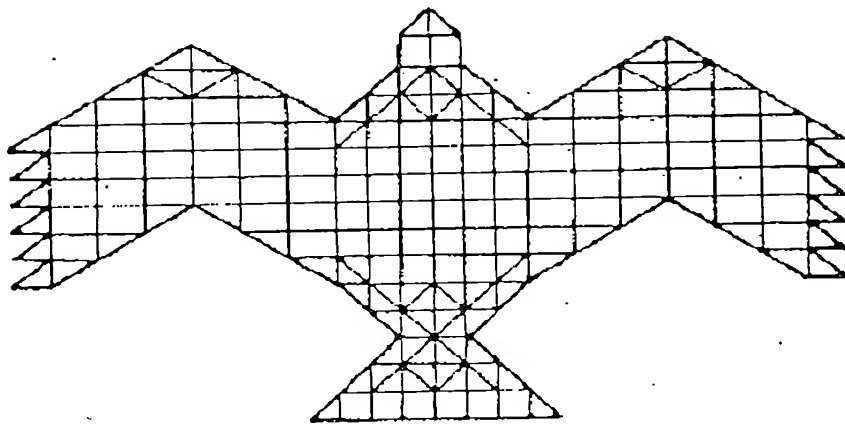
- Yogi Sudhananda Bharati.

End Notes & References

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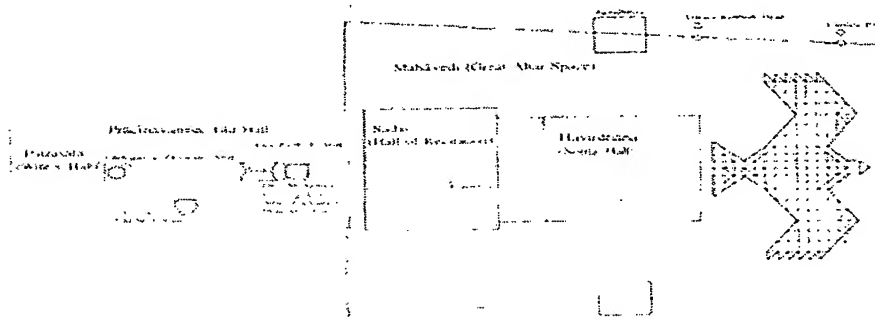
Photographs and Illustrations

1. *GARUDA CHAYANA* – The Bird Alter

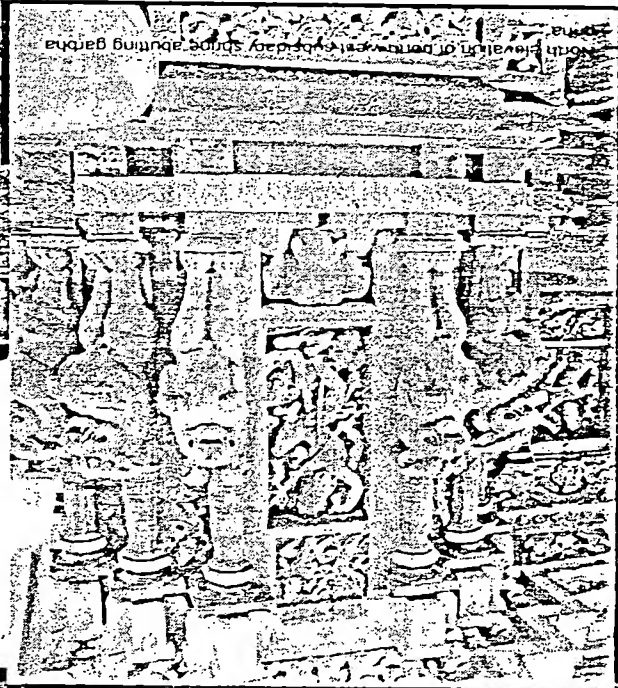


2. *Yajna shala*

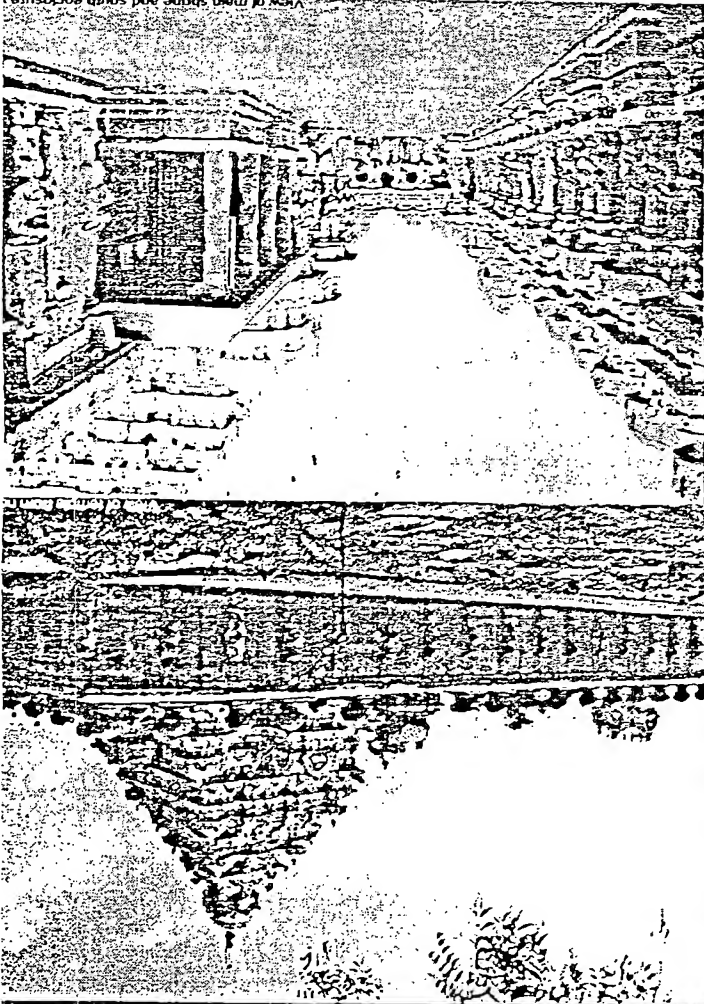
Yaga Mantapa



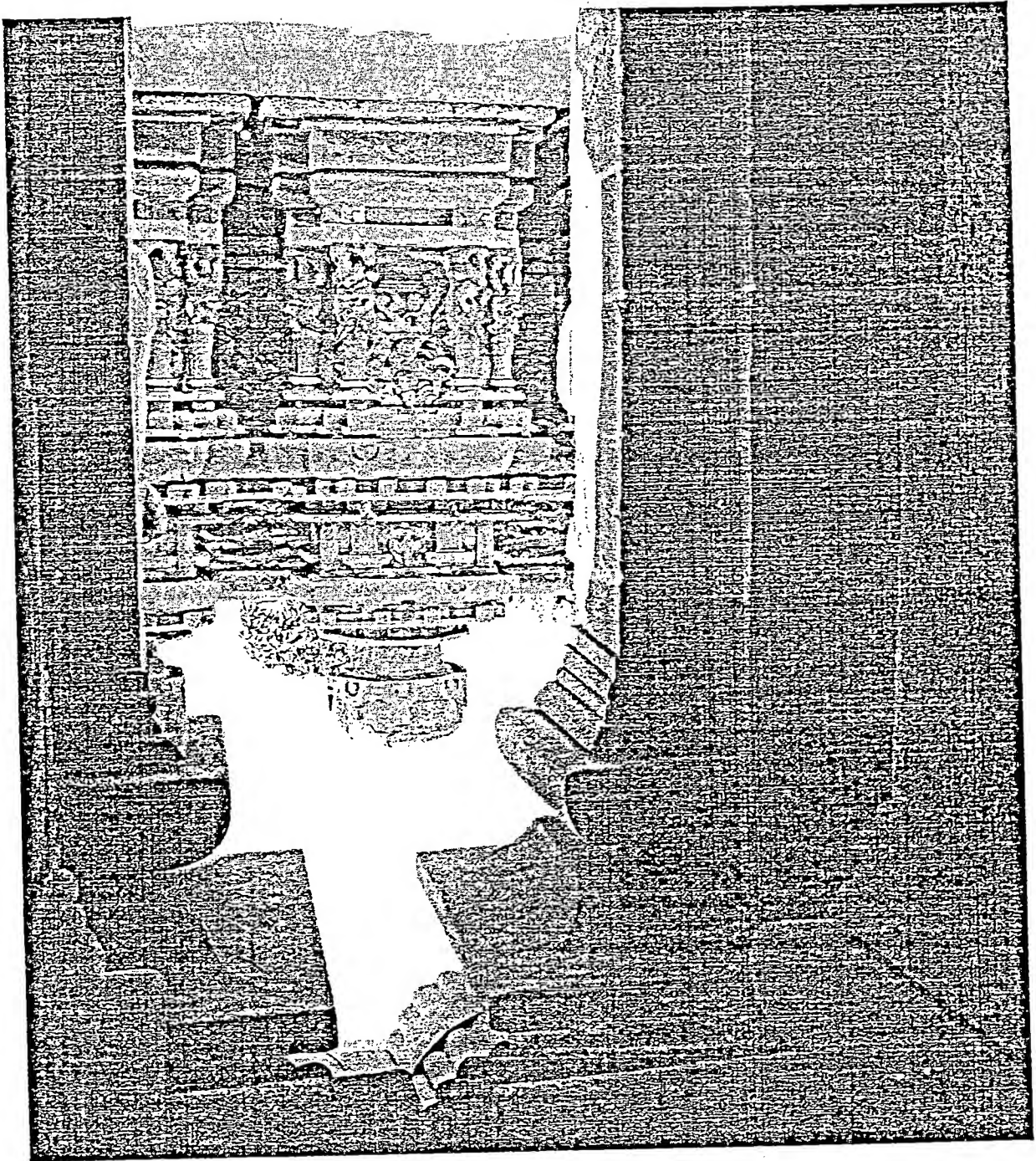
Kailasanatha Temple Kanchipuram



North elevation of the temple, showing the main shrine and the surrounding wall.



View of main shrine and south enclosure.



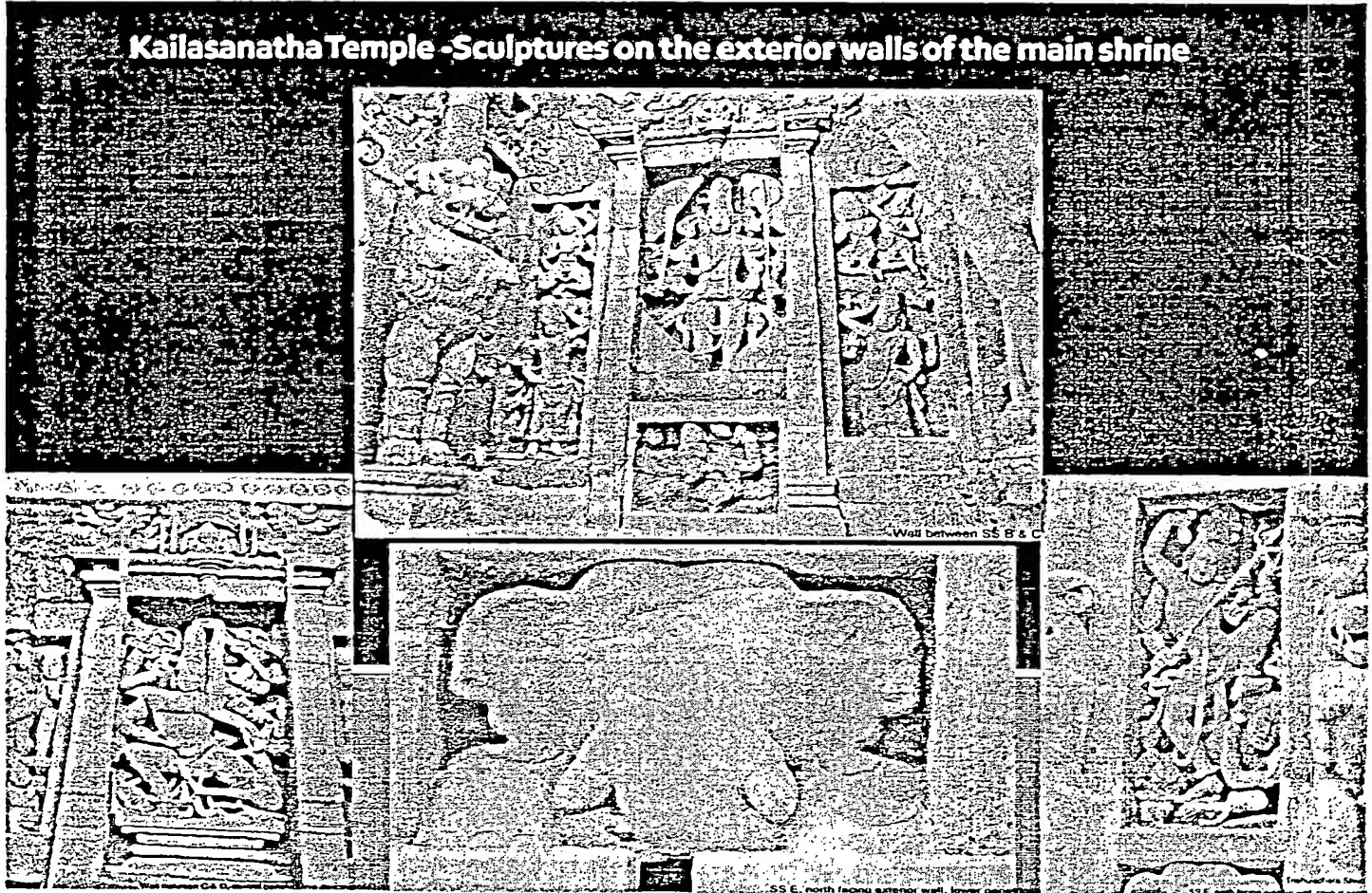
4. Kaliasanatha Temple – View of Shrines from South Prakara

5. Kailasanatha Temple – *Shikara* portion and shrines

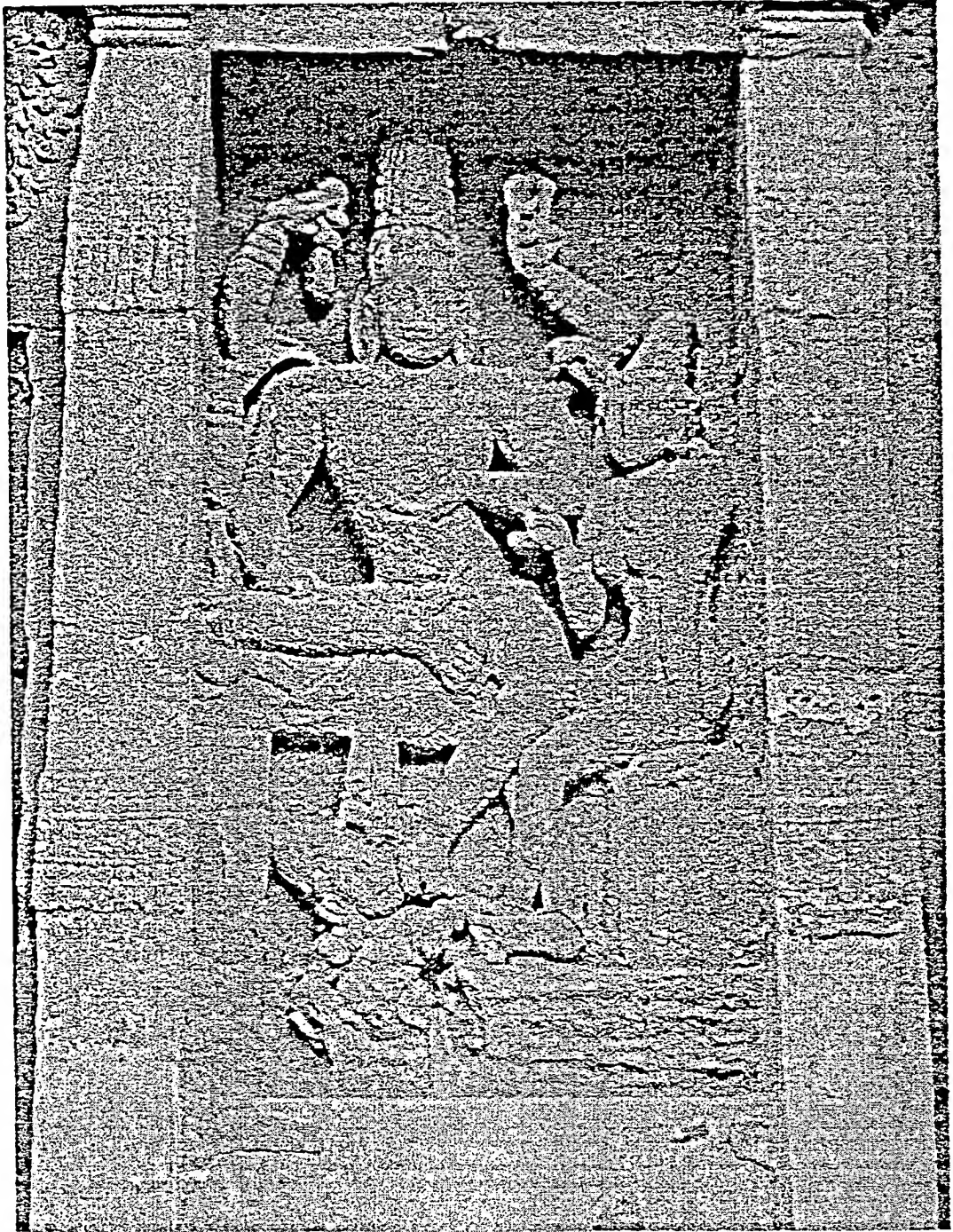


6. Kailasanatha Temple Wall panel

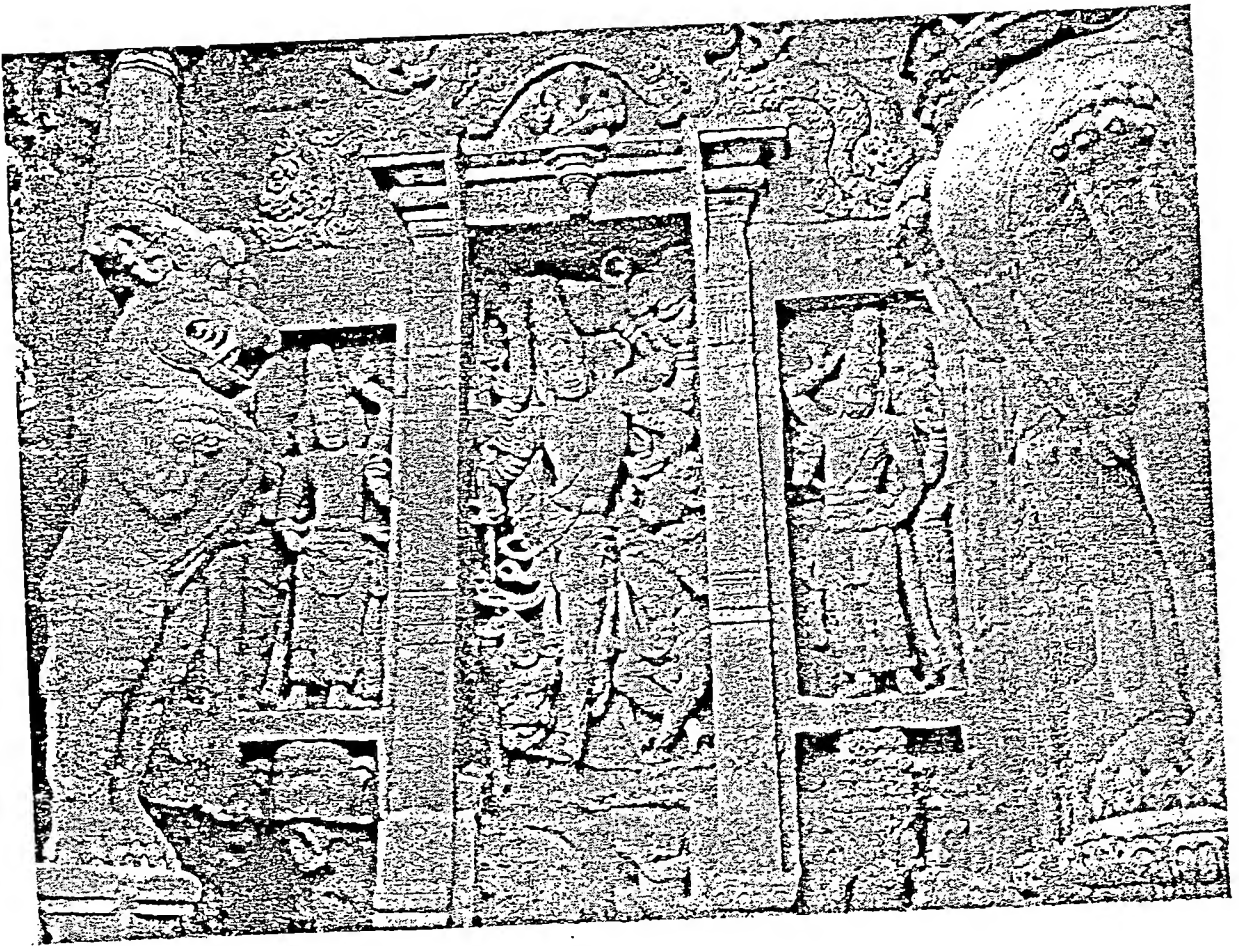
Kailasanatha Temple -Sculptures on the exterior walls of the main shrine



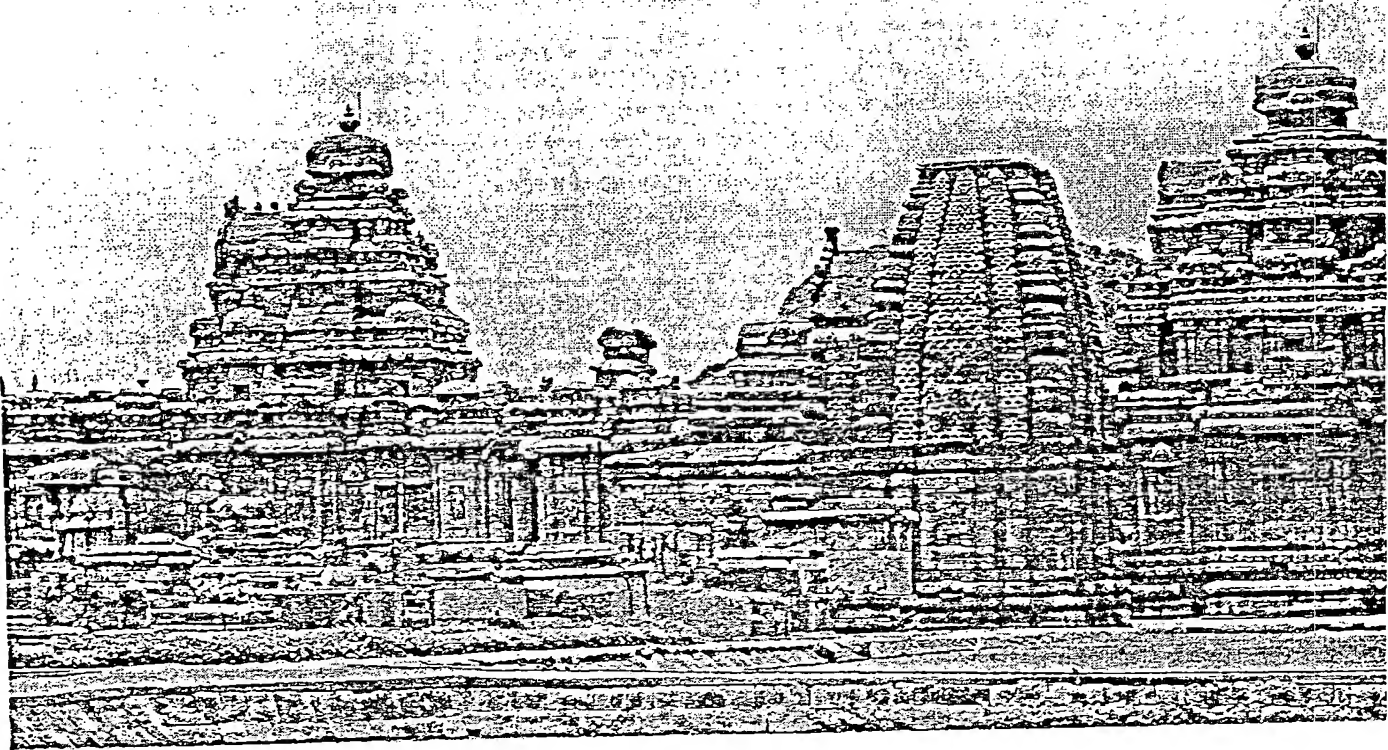
7. Kailasanatha Temple – Uma Maheshvara



8. Kailasanatha Temple – Shiva in Urdhva Tandava flanked by Brahmha and Vishnu



9. Virupaksha Temple complex -Pattadakal



Nandi

One has to pass through
Vrashabha the gigantic bull
before entering kailasa –

So also in Temple architecture –
Nandi Mantapa is at the entry
point.

